

Ireland has a wealth of inland waterways – rivers, lakes and canals – which offer unrivalled opportunities to see the countryside from different perspectives.

The history and background to the natural and man-made assets that are Ireland's inland waterways is diverse and rich in heritage. From beautiful landscapes to wildlife wonders, historical buildings to locks and bridges, from peaceful canals to wide open rivers and lakes, Ireland's inland waterways are a fantastic resource for our enjoyment.

However, the increased popularity of the waterways has also seen increased impacts. These include unsightly and dangerous rubbish, increased erosion, and the spread of invasive species and aquatic disease.

This guide is intended to assist all water users to share the waterways in a sustainable manner ensuring the interests of all are considered and respected. Help us protect our waterways by abiding by the principles of Leave No Trace.

## leavenotraceireland.org

Leave No Trace Ireland is a not-for-profit company made up of partner organisations with a shared interest in encouraging responsible enjoyment of Ireland's natural environment. Our mission is to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research, and partnership throughout the island of Ireland.



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## Waterways Ireland

Developed in collaboration with Waterways Ireland, the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development and promotion of over 1000 km of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes.



Iascach Intíre Éireann  
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**Responsible Outdoor  
Recreation**  
Inland Waterways



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## 1. Plan Ahead and Prepare

When planning your visit along the inland waterways be aware of and follow local regulations or bye-laws. If access to the waterway requires you to cross private land, ask the landowner's permission and respect their rights. Have you informed someone of your route? Always check the weather forecast. Be prepared to adjust your plans, if necessary. Water safety is paramount so have a personal flotation device and wear it, and planning is essential. Be sure to take note of signage and notices for safety areas. Make sure the waterway you plan to visit is appropriate for your activity, ability and the numbers involved.



## 2. Be Considerate of Others

In some locations there may be several activities making use of the same waterway. Respect the rights of others and observe local etiquette. Remember, inland waterways can contain varying water depths, from shallow to very deep. They can also range from expansive lakes to relatively confined canals. For safety reasons, always give way to motorised craft. It is recommended that, where possible, portage around the lock is undertaken. Alternatively, the craft should be pulled into the lock with a rope. Consultation with the Waterways Ireland lock keeper / patroller is advised on how best to ensure safe passage through the lock. Take care not to interfere with others interests and avoid going close to water intakes, abstraction points or spillways.

By communicating with each other and applying a degree

of patience, it is possible for all user groups to enjoy Ireland's waterways with the minimum disruption to each other's activities. Towpaths are there for everyone to enjoy responsibly, including ramblers, dog-walkers, cyclists, runners. This mix of users and their different needs means that everybody using the towpaths must be aware of, and respect, others.

Take all your litter home. Unauthorised vehicles, motorcycles, quad bikes, and scramblers are strictly prohibited. Be sure your gear, including boats, kayaks, and canoes do not cause obstruction and be mindful in high winds. Never interfere with public safety equipment, fishing equipment or navigation markers. All engine-powered boats create a wave of water, known as a wash, which flows outwards from the boat as it moves forward. Look behind you frequently to check the effect that your wash is having on other users. Slow down where boats are moored, when approaching quays, jetties, or locks, or where water activities are taking place.

## 3. Respect Farm Animals & Wildlife

Use binoculars to enjoy wildlife and be sure to keep your distance from mammals and birds (especially if they are nesting). In places where dogs are permitted, ensure that you keep your dog under control and on a lead if required as they can easily cause disruption to wildlife. You are advised to reduce your speed in narrow channels to prevent bank erosion, damage to reed beds and destruction of birds' nests that may be present. Ensure that you do not leave any fishing lines or bait as these may harm birds and other wildlife. Ensure food waste is not introduced into the ecosystem.

## 4. Travel & Camp on Durable Ground

Stay on established towpaths and roads and use designated car parks. Use existing boat ramps, launching sites, and mooring sites to minimise the disturbance of the edges of waterways. Official camp sites are reducing in number and it is increasingly the case that wild or informal camping is a necessary part of a multi-day trip. Camp on durable surfaces when camping by riverbanks or on islands. However, if there is an official campsite close by please consider using it. Be aware of not only your own impact, but repeated impact by

others. Enjoy the freedom of wild camping without leaving a trace of your passage.

## 5. Leave What You Find

Our inland waterways are of historical significance with many containing working locks and bridges. Observe features of archaeological and historic interest, but do not disturb them. Take only photos, drawings, and memories. Leave plants, artefacts and other items of interest as you find them, so passing the same gift of discovery on to those who follow. Prevent the spread of invasive species on our waterways by cleaning your watercraft, trailers, and equipment thoroughly after every trip, preferably before you leave the site. Leave fishing and navigation buoys alone, they keep other people safe. When fishing practice CPR – catch-photo- release to conserve fish stock and so that others can enjoy the thrill of fishing.

## 6. Dispose of Waste Properly

Take everything you brought with you home again and dispose of it properly when you get there. Plan your visit to reduce rubbish by repacking food into recyclable containers before you leave home. Disposal of toilet waste in the wrong place can contaminate water, damage the environment and is culturally offensive. Use land-based toilets where available. Otherwise, bury human waste in a shallow hole at least 30 metres away from water sources. Be careful with chemicals. Careless use of soaps, detergents, fuels, oils, paints and anti-foulants can harm plants and animals and affect the health, safety, and enjoyment of other water users.

## 7. Minimise the Effects of Fire

Waterway users, particularly canoeists and sailors, often enjoy multi-day trips or expeditions. Check first that campfires are permitted in the place you want to camp. A portable stove is the best way to minimise your impact and is cleaner and more efficient. If no stove is available, then use an established fire ring. Learn the skills of setting a low impact mound fire to avoid scorching or scarring the soil. Keep fires small, using only dead material for firewood. Always be sure a fire has fully burned out and clear all traces.